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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Sixteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD (PARTIAL)* OF THE 399th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 22 September 1997, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting (closed).

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GE.97-18222 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The CHAIRPERSON declared open the sixteenth session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

STATEMENT BY THE OFFICER-IN-CHARGE, HIGH COMMISSIONER/CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

2. Mr. ZACKLIN (Officer-in-Charge, High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights) said that Mrs. Robinson had been appointed High Commissioner for Human Rights at the beginning of June 1997. When she returned from New York, where she would be attending the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, Mrs. Robinson intended to meet the Committee members. In his report entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a Programme for Reform", the Secretary-General had underlined that human rights were integral to the promotion of peace and security, economic prosperity and social equity and had confirmed that priority would be given to action to strengthen and coordinate substantive and technical support for human rights legislative bodies, treaty bodies and special procedures and had announced that efforts to establish common data banks of information, research and analysis to assist those bodies would be accelerated. Lastly, the Office of the High Commissioner and the Centre for Human Rights had been consolidated in a single unit, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, with a Deputy High Commissioner to assist and provide management support for the High Commissioner.

3. Turning to some other recent developments of more direct relevance to the Committee, he noted that, with the ratification of the Convention by the Cook Islands in June 1997, the total number of States parties stood at 191. The High Commissioner's Plan of Action to support the implementation of the Convention had reached its operational phase and a support team had started work. That was particularly timely, because the Committee's already considerable workload would noticeably increase in the near future when it embarked on the consideration of the second periodic reports of States parties. In that connection, he said that the acceptance of the amendment to the Convention by 40 States would raise the number of Committee members from 10 to 18.

4. The Secretary-General had appointed a Special Representative, Mr. Olara Otunnu, for a term of three years, to study the impact of armed conflict on children. Mr. Otunnu would be responsible for assessing the progress achieved, steps taken and difficulties encountered in alleviating the plight of children who were victims of armed conflicts. The Special Representative, who had been nominated after extensive consultations with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF and UNHCR, would work closely with the Committee and would report annually to the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights.

5. At its forty-ninth session, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities had requested the Commission on Human Rights to consider the possibility of appointing a Special Rapporteur on the situation of street children and to ask one of its experts to draft a

working paper on juvenile justice. The Sub-Commission had also decided to forward to the Committee a copy of the summary records of meetings at which agenda item 10 bis ("Promotion and protection of the human rights of children and youth") had been discussed, since the Sub-Commission had recommended under that item that the Committee on the Rights of the Child should consider drawing up general comments on articles 2, 37 and 40 of the Convention. The Sub-Commission had expressed its willingness to provide assistance, if required, with the drafting of a general comment on article 2 concerning discrimination.

6. The Eighth Meeting of Persons Chairing the Human Rights Treaty Bodies had been held in Geneva from 15 to 19 September 1997. The Chairperson of the Committee, who had played an active part in that meeting, would undoubtedly wish to inform the Committee members about its outcome and further discuss with them the main issues raised on that occasion, as well as the report of the independent expert on enhancing the long-term effectiveness of the human rights treaty system (E/CN.4/1997/74).

7. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee had been studying the question of the general comments requested by the Sub-Commission for quite a while and, after six years of activity, it thought that the time had come to buckle down to the task. It had yet to select the subject matter of such general comments. That would probably be done by the end of the session, on the basis of the pertinent suggestions and recommendations made by United Nations bodies and various NGOs.

8. Noting that only six members of the Committee were present, the rest being absent owing to their other commitments, she stressed how vital it was to increase the number of members. She welcomed the appointment of a Special Representative to examine the impact of armed conflicts on children and pointed out that the idea had first been mooted by the Committee. It would be desirable for the Special Representative to meet the Committee at an appropriate time in order to inform it of the action he had taken and the way in which the Committee could provide him with back-up. Lastly, she welcomed the steps taken with regard to street children and juvenile justice, as the latter topic was always raised whenever the reports of States parties were studied.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (item 1 of the agenda)

9. The provisional agenda (CRC/C/68) was adopted.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND OTHER MATTERS (item 2 of the agenda)

10. Mrs. RAADI-AZARACHCHI (Secretary of the Committee) announced that since its fifteenth session, the Committee had received the initial report of Venezuela, the second periodic reports of Bolivia and Honduras and two supplementary reports submitted in response to the Committee's requests, one from Yemen and the other, on Hong Kong, from the United Kingdom.

11. Mrs. KARP asked for information about progress with the support team, which was to have been set up to ease the workload of Committee members as far as possible.

12. The CHAIRPERSON said that the support team had been established and that four of its members were present. She invited them to introduce themselves.

13. Mrs. MALUWA (Coordinator of the Support Team) said that she came from Malawi and was a trained lawyer. In the course of her work, she had helped to draft legal texts and, in particular, had contributed to the revision of Malawi's domestic law with a view to bringing it into line with the international instruments to which the country was a party, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. She had represented Malawi on the Commission on Human Rights from 1994 to 1996. She had closely collaborated with the NGOs concerned with women's rights and the rights of the child and she had herself founded an NGO which set out to facilitate the access of women and children to justice.

14. Mrs. TATON (Support Team) said that she held a master's degree in international law and had worked at a Belgian university, mainly in the sphere of private international law. She had worked at the office of the Centre for Human Rights in Cambodia, where she had been responsible for providing the Cambodian Government with legal counselling in respect of the rights of the child and for training the staff of local NGOs and government officials with a view to realizing the rights of the child.

15. Mrs. RISHNIAWI (Support Team) said that she held a master's degree from the University of Essex in human rights law and had specialized in employment, development and the rights of the child. For the previous 10 years she had been working with NGOs in the field of labour law and women's and children's rights. She had acted as a consultant to UNICEF and the ILO on various occasions and had written several reports on the rights of the child and labour law.

16. Mr. VERGARA (Support Team) said that he came from El Salvador and held a master's degree in international relations. For three years, he had researched into development in Latin America and had worked for two and a half years for the Foreign Ministry of El Salvador providing liaison between the Government and the United Nations bodies associated with the implementation of the peace agreements between the Salvadoran Government and the guerrillas. Furthermore, he had worked for more than two years at the Central American Bank for Economic Integration which financed development projects and the building of infrastructure in the region.

17. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee would examine the reports of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Australia, Uganda, the Czech Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, and Togo. Monday, 6 October would be devoted to a general discussion. She invited the Committee members to hold private consultations for the remainder of the meeting.

The discussion covered in the partial summary record of the meeting ended at 11.05 a.m.